



HEARD ABOUT



By Paul Wahl, Editor

Innovation Invitation

Some weeks ago, the organizers of the British Equestrian Trade Association trade show invited me to be one of the judges for its annual innovation awards in February. Manufacturers submit their best products for evaluation. The awards are highly coveted.

I mentioned the competition to one of my American colleagues. "Good thing you're giving the awards in the United Kingdom, because if you had the same contest in the United States, there would be no entries."

His opinion is one held by a number of people, who seem to agree with the Biblical King David that there is "nothing new under the sun." Innovation has been replaced by imitation.

It was about the same time that we began working on our two primary features for this month's edition—the fall fashion shoot and the 101 Best New Products. It didn't take but a day or two to realize that my colleague's condemnation of our industry wasn't completely correct.

After you take a close look at these features, I think you'll agree. The quality and uniqueness of many of the products are the results of clever minds and considerable investment.

By example, consider the amount of engineering that goes into making today's Western footwear. It wasn't that many years back that many boot parts were stamped out of unforgiving materials and cobbled together into a product that was anything but fashionable or comfortable. Today's footwear looks great and feels more like a sock.

Also look at the stable to street trend that's coming from many of our leading English manufacturers. The style, durability and selection in these lines is incredible and seems to grow each week.

While it's true that there are still a number of companies firmly rooted in the past, a good argument can be made that our industry is becoming as forward-looking as it has ever been.

Innovation has to be encouraged in order to flourish. Unfortunately, as long as there are retailers and consumers who won't buy anything new because it's not what they've always bought, innovation will probably continue to be stifled. In our industry, innovation can mean a considerable risk of time and assets. It's not for the faint of heart.

What's needed is to let the truly innovative companies know that they're doing a good thing by purchasing those products and pushing them to do even more. 🐾

Want to read more of the editor's thoughts on the equine trade industry? Visit his blog at www.tackntogs.com.

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